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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION YOUTH LEADER RECEIVES 18 MONTHS

REF: MINSK 1162

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) On November 1, Judge Alla Bulash convicted Dmitriy Dashkevich, the leader of the opposition youth organization Malady Front, for allegedly operating an unregistered organization (reftel). In a courtroom opened to Dashkevich's father, international observers and a small number of independent media, Dashkevich received a sentence of 18 months in prison. Upon hearing the sentence, Dashkevich replied with quietly defiant resolve, "This is my victory. This is my victory."

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador offered sympathy and condolences to the father of the accused, Vyacheslav Dashkevich, and several Dashkevich supporters gathered at Oktyabrskiy Courthouse. Also present at the verdict were German Ambassador Martin Hecker, representing the EU presidency, and OSCE Head of Mission Ambassador AkYQQQQIM=99

¶3. (C) Following the verdict, Ambassador spoke with Dashkevich's defense attorney, who told Ambassador that he was planning an immediate appeal. He predicted that the GOB would issue an amnesty, like that soon to be granted to political prisoner Sergey Skrebets, and expressed hope that Dashkevich would be released in less than five months.

¶4. (SBU) Ambassador gave interviews to independent Belarusian and international media, including Belarus i Rynok and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, outside the courtroom. Ambassador condemned the sentence and noted that the United States will continue to hold accountable those responsible for abuses of the rights of Belarusian citizens. Ambassador also called on the Belarusian authorities to free former opposition presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin, NGO Partnership election monitors Nikolay Astreyko and Timofey Dranchuk, and all those imprisoned on politically motivated charges.

¶5. (SBU) Present outside the courthouse were leaders of the major Belarusian opposition parties, including United Civic Party chairman Anatoly Lebedko, Belarusian Party of Communists Sergey Kalyakin, and Belarusian Social Democratic Party (BSDP) Acting Chairman Anatoliy Levkovich and Deputy Chair Aleksey Korol. As on the first day of the trial, about 60 activists, wearing red and white Malady Front T-shirts, stood outside the court entrance, placed red and white roses and images of Dashkevich on the court steps, and chanted "Freedom to Dashkevich!"

¶6. (C) COMMENT: As in the Partnership case, the court's decision to grant international observers access to the verdict was a hollow gesture to the international community. Even if Dashkevich receives a lighter sentence through a

possible amnesty, the entire criminal case hitherto and any time Dashkevich serves in prison will remain an egregious violation of the basic human rights of Dashkevich and the Belarusian people.
Stewart